

The Gurnet *PART II ?*

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(Written in 1935)

The War of 1812 brought stirring days to the Gurnet. During the war period 1812-1815 there were English frigates cruising about and there was a small battery fort at the mouth of Bluefish River in Duxbury guarding the shipping there, to protect it from raids. In those days Duxbury was a prominent ship-building town.

The fort at the Gurnet with its brick magazine, was mounted with at least 2 guns of 42 lbs. calibre and garrisoned a number of state troops. A fleet of alarm boats, called the row guard, plied between the Gurnet and Plymouth Beach. They were to give the alarm of any expedition from the frigates. A bonfire was lighted on Captain's Hill, South Duxbury (now the location of Myles Standish Monument). This being taken up by signal stations in Plymouth and Kingston served to call the Minutemen from the surrounding countryside. The militiamen at Gurnet on one occasion sank a British vessel which came within gun shot.

Another thrilling event probably visible from the Gurnet during the War of 1812 was the naval battle between the ships "Chesapeake" and "Shannon" off Brant Rock, June 1, 1813, which brought forth the famous words of Capt. Lawrence of the defeated American frigate, "Don't give up the ship." History books state the battle was fought off Salem and Marblehead but it was so far out as to be practically abreast Marshfield as well. Farther up the coast during this war occurred the well known hoax when the maid Becky Bates and her girl companion marched up and down behind Scituate Sand Hills playing on a fife and drum in order to deceive the sailors on the English frigates off shore into thinking an army drilled by the seacoast.

The soil of the Gurnet was hallowed many times by the footprints of the great Daniel Webster, who lived in Marshfield during the last 20 years of his life (1832-1852). Webster came to the Gurnet many times on gunning trips and loved the place. He sometimes pitched his tent near the ocean front on land owned by the author, just south of Manson's cottage. But as a rule he stopped at Harvey Ransome's little cottage located on the rocks on the bay side. It has been enlarged since then and moved back. It is owned and occupied summers by Mr. and Mrs. James Watson. Webster loved Duxbury.



Gurnet's twin lights, erected in 1842. Only one of them stands today.

dunes for protection. One of his biographers speaks of his drives along the beach in the summer of 1849 and it is said that he brought Lord Ashburton to the Gurnet in 1842.

The great Gurnet romance dates from the War of 1812. According to tradition, Capt. Thomas Burgess, keeper of the light, had a 16-year-old daughter, Eunice, who fell in love with Sgt. Ripley, a soldier at the fort. He forbade his daughter to marry the young man and the lovesick couple made a suicide pact. They were to sit upon the loftiest rock on the ocean front where they had spent so many stolen moments and let the tide wash them out to sea. The tide rose and swirled angrily around the base of the rock, Eunice dramatically jumped and was drowned. Her less heroic lover stood like Casabianca, but on a rock not a deck. Her father in an excess of grief declared he would not object to the marriage of any of his daughters, no matter whom they chose. As to the authenticity of this legend we cannot attest, but evidently something occurred as there were people living in recent times who claimed to have attended the funeral of the unfortunate Eunice. We have no record of what.

of lovers and is known as "Lovers' Rock."

Capt. Burgess, the stern parent, was a very ugly man and easily identified by the thrum cap he habitually wore. He was born and he also died a Squish, presumably in the old Burgess home, a typical Cape Cod dwelling which stood until the early part of the century after which it went to rack and ruin.



Capt. Tom's son, Joe Burgess, lived in the Gurnet farmhouse. There appears to be only 2 old families in this section, the Burgess family on the Gurnet and Saquish and the Watson family on Clark's Island. There seems to be some connection between the Burgess family and Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother.

One amusing anecdote picked up at Plymouth in 1859 by Henry Thoreau concerns a certain Gen. Winslow who went with a party of friends to the Gurnet to make whoopee. When it came time to go back to the mainland, the general had succumbed. His friends, for a trick, departed without him. When the general awoke and found himself forsaken, he lost no time in riding his horse to Saquish; he then swam his horse to Plymouth Beach. His friends were taking the round-about route up the beach, through Marshfield, Duxbury and Kingston. Imagine their surprise at finding him in Plymouth on their arrival!

In 1842 the final pair of twin lighthouses were erected, one of which still stands. From about 1840 to 1860 a dance hall and cafe known as "Old Sebastopol" stood at the Gurnet, which was a popular resort for the people of Plymouth. This building was afterwards moved to Green Harbor, where it still stands as a summer hotel, The Riverside House.

All this time the farm was owned and occupied by Joseph Burgess, who finally deeded the farm to Leander Lovell April 17, 1852. This occurred a few months before the death of Webster and thus the Gurnet property passed out of the Burgess family.

When the Civil War broke out, a new fortification was erected and named Fort Andrews, the remains of which may still be seen. The fort was equipped with heavier and more efficient guns. A fort was also built on Saquish and named Fort Standish.

During the Civil War (1861-65) another dance hall flourished. This structure was located near where the little schoolhouse (now Oram cottage) was later built on the bay side.

On July 23, 1869 the French Atlantic cable was landed on the Duxbury Beach at Rouse's Hummock, north of the present bridge, with appropriate

ceremonies held on July 27.

On Oct. 18, 1872, Leander Lovell, after 20 years' ownership, deeded the property to George Hall of Marshfield, who made extensive improvements. A son of this new occupant gave the writer much of the historical data for this article in 1912. George Hall enlarged the old farmhouse making it a house of 20 rooms or more. The roof was built from wood taken from the old Saquish Barracks, which building also contributed material for John Batchelder's cottage on the bay side. Mr. Hall ran the estate as a summer hostelry for 13 years. In 1879 he moved a building from South Duxbury and located it on the ocean bluff near the farmhouse as a dancing pavilion. It weathered the wintry gales for many a year until it was torn down, fairly recently.

The Halls really made the place what it is today and the house still stands in splendid condition. Mrs. Harriet Hopkins of Medford told the writer of boarding with the Halls and having such a tremendous Gurnet appetite, a common thing for all visitors, she could not satisfy it.

During the Christmas holidays in 1884, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Lafayette Boardman of Boston visited Mr. and Mrs. Hall at the instigation of their friend, Mr. Orin Gray, a Boston lawyer. They had spent some time there in the summer, had fallen in love with it and this winter visit was made with the possible thought of buying. The weather was so mild that December that they were able to sit out of doors.

On Jan. 20, 1885, an agreement was made by Joseph Boardman and George Hall to trade the Gurnet for a farm in Lexington, Mass. The property was deeded to Ellen Boardman (Mrs. Joseph) by Mr. Hall and the deed recorded Feb. 27, 1885.

(To be continued)